

The Effect of the Mere Exposure Effect on Language Teaching and Learning

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ABSTRACT

This research paper is trying to answer the question “What is the effect of the mere exposure effect on language teaching and learning?” In order to answer this question, the researcher analyzed both the process of the mere exposure effect and a number of previous studies about the subject. The mere exposure effect is the increased favorability of a specific stimulus due to repeated exposure to said stimulus. The results of this research paper show that the mere exposure effect can have both a positive effect and a negative effect on language teaching and learning. However, these effects depend on the existence or non-existence of certain factors alongside the mere exposure effect. In the case of the mere exposure effect having a positive effect on language teaching and learning, several factors must exist alongside it. These factors include varied and new subjects, varied styles of teaching and learning, adaptability, and a love for languages. This shows that the mere exposure effect is only a factor in the processes of language teaching and learning. So, teachers and students must pay attention to the other factors and not only to the mere exposure effect in order to achieve a positive effect on language teaching and learning.

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Introduction

In our world, when someone hears the words learning and teaching, the first thought to come to his mind is easy. However, despite the common picture portrayed in people's minds, learning and teaching are complicated processes that contain many variables and theories for them to work. Some of these variables are the style used in both, the compatibility with the subject matter, motivation, and much more. These variables or factors are very important in teaching and learning because they influence academic achievements directly (Ismail et al., 2019).

In other words, learning and teaching are not as simple as they may seem, and before even beginning one of these processes, one must explore all the variables to find his own style in conducting them. For instance, each person has a unique style when it comes to teaching and learning anything. At the same time, the same person might have subjects that he is not good at teaching or does not like to learn. These learning and

teaching styles are important in improving the efficiency of teaching and learning (Aldajah et al., 2014). However, they are only one factor of the many factors and variables to be considered in both the processes of teaching and learning. Many of these variables are determined by something that most people do not know or realize, which is called the mere exposure effect.

According to Zajonc (as cited in Zizak & Reber, 2004), the mere exposure effect is the repeated exposure to a stimulus, making it more favored by the person over other stimuli. In simpler terms, the more times a person is exposed to a certain thing, the higher the chance of him choosing it over other things. This also is true in the case of learning and teaching. For example, if a person has tried a specific method of teaching over and over again, he will not hesitate to choose that method over other new methods.

This shows that the mere exposure effect plays a big role in both learning and teaching. This role is exactly what this study is aiming to investigate. Specifically, the study focuses on the effect of the mere exposure effect on language teaching and learning. By exploring this subject, researchers can gain a better understanding involved in teaching and learning. Ultimately, this may help teacher improve their teaching methods and students enhance their learning outcomes.

Teachers can understand their reliance on a specific method of teaching by understanding the mere exposure effect and its role in that process, resulting in them trying different teaching methods and improving themselves. The same can be said for students, who by understanding the role of the mere exposure effect in their learning process, can learn in a better way.

This research paper is trying to find the effect that the mere exposure effect has on teaching and learning languages as there has yet to be an existing idea of the exact effect of the mere exposure effect on this subject. It is also worth mentioning that discovering this effect will help researchers gain more insights into the process of teaching and learning languages, which in turn will help in advancing teachers' teaching methods and the students' learning methods. For all of these reasons, it is important to conduct this research as well as invest in similar studies.

The objectives of this study are separated into the main objective and the sub-objectives, and it is worth mentioning that the sub-objectives achievability depends on the success of achieving the main objective. The main objective of this study is to examine the effect of the mere exposure effect on language teaching and learning. In addition to this primary goal, the study also aims to achieve several sub-objectives. First, it seeks to gain new insights into the processes of teaching and learning. Second, it intends to help both teachers and students make their teaching and learning experiences easier through the analysis and understanding of the mere exposure effect. Finally, it aims to facilitate the processes of language teaching and learning by clarifying the role of the mere exposure effect in these processes. This research paper is aiming to answer the following question:

1. What is the effect of the mere exposure effect on language teaching and learning?

Literature Review

The mere exposure effect is an interesting subject to study because it uncovers a lot of information about the human mind and the process of learning. That is why many researchers have studied the subject thoroughly. The researcher reviewed some of these studies in order to achieve the goal of this study, and these papers include:

A study aimed to investigate whether the mere exposure effect could occur consciously rather than unconsciously. The researchers wanted to determine if the mere exposure effect could occur normally if the participants were not exposed frequently to a certain stimulus but instead were told that a certain stimulus would occur frequently (Dessel et al., 2017). The results showed that the effect of the mere exposure instructions depends largely on the participant's ability to remember the stimulus that will appear frequently.

Another study aimed to investigate the effect of multiple stimuli on the power of the mere exposure effect (Uechi & Taya, 2016). Usually, the mere exposure effect consists of one stimulus, but in this study, more stimuli were shown to a group of participants in order to find the effect that will have on the mere exposure effect. The results of this study suggest that having multiple stimuli can help strengthen the mere exposure effect.

A different study done by Ladd and Gabrieli (2015) investigated the effect that anxiety has on the mere exposure effect. In order to achieve this goal, the researchers did two experiments on participants who suffer from anxiety. The study results showed that anxiety has an effect on the mere exposure effect. However, this effect depends largely on the degree of anxiety in a person. Whereas the greater the anxiety, the more the mere exposure effect became reduced.

Lastly, a study done by Jones et al. (2011) on the effect of the mere exposure effect on approach movements. In order to achieve this goal, the researchers conducted two experiments that contained different stimuli that the participants had to approach. The results of these experiments showed that the participants were faster in approaching the stimulus they were familiar with compared to the unfamiliar stimulus.

After examining these studies, among others, on the subject of the mere exposure effect, the researcher did not find any studies that talk about the role that the mere exposure effect plays in language learning and teaching. Therefore, this research is crucial in understanding the impact of the exposure effect on language acquisition and instruction.

The Process of the Mere Exposure Effect

The Mere Exposure Effect is a psychological phenomenon that signifies our inclination to develop preferences for things merely due to their familiarity. This phenomenon applies to objects, individuals, and even ideas. The Mere-Exposure Effect is a cognitive bias that affects how we perceive things and people. Essentially, the more we see and interact with something or someone, the more we tend to like them. In other words, the more exposure we have to something, the more positively we tend to react to it. In other words, "The mere exposure effect (MEE) refers to an increase in liking of repeatedly exposed stimuli" (Zajonc as cited in Molet et al., 2021, p. 81).

The Mere Exposure Effect can be explained through two main concepts. The first concept is the Familiarity Principle, which, at its core, is the mere exposure effect itself. Basically, the more you become familiar with something, even merely and briefly, the more you like it and feel comfortable with it. This can be attributed to our brain's natural tendency to seek familiarity while avoiding uncertainty. From an evolutionary standpoint, this preference for the familiar has been a survival mechanism, as the known is generally safer, while the unknown carries potential risks. This preference has contributed to our species' survival and progress over time by staying away from unfamiliar things that represent danger. By getting exposed to the same stimulus repetitively, a person can build an impression of this stimulus, which makes him feel a sense of safety (Stevenson, 2022). This impression and feeling of safety are one of the factors that helped humans survive due to their usefulness in avoiding new and unknown things that may be dangerous. This is how our human race has managed to survive and has managed to become better as time goes on.

This is similar in a way to the concept of the comfort zone. Many of us gravitate toward our comfort zone because we are accustomed to it. However, stepping outside our comfort zone can make us feel awkward and uncertain, as we fear the unfamiliar. To explain more, we can extend our comfort zone and overcome our panic zone (outside of our comfort zone) by merely exposing individuals to different educational environment stimuli. Gradually, their interactions and behaviors in these novel environments will become distinct, making them more accustomed to these stimuli. This approach can significantly enhance learning and teaching environments.

The second concept that is part of the mere exposure effect is cognitive fluency, also known as cognitive ease or perceptual fluency. Cognitive fluency is defined as “the speed and ease with which a stimulus is processed, has been linked to many types of subjective judgments” (Reber et al., as cited in Lanska et al, 2013, p. 1). In other words, cognitive fluency refers to the ease and smoothness with which our minds process information or tasks. It relates to the mental effort or friction involved in various cognitive processes. When a task or information is cognitively fluent, it means that it is processed with minimal effort, quickly, and without any sense of difficulty.

Our minds prefer to do simple things that require the least mental load, hard cognitive tasks, like reading a new book, which takes a lot of time and attention, which is why we try to avoid reading. But once we read the same book twice or thrice, probably we will find that it is easier to understand because we have already learned about the characters and the plot, and we are not burdened with the cognitive processing of taking it all in. Cognitive fluency can be influenced by various factors, including the simplicity and clarity of information, prior familiarity with a task, and the absence of distractions. When something is cognitively fluent, it tends to feel comfortable and intuitive.

The Mere Exposure Effect Benefits and Shortcomings in Teaching and Learning

The mere exposure effect is closely related to both the processes of teaching and learning. In a way, it can be considered as one of the variables that exist in these processes. Of course, like any other variable, the mere exposure effect has its ways in

which it benefits the processes and ways in which it harms them. By analyzing the way in which the mere exposure effect functions, the benefits and shortcomings of using this process in teaching and learning become clear.

After analyzing the mere exposure effect, it is clear that it has five benefits in teaching and learning. These benefits include enhanced memory, easier understanding of subjects, increased learning and teaching efficiency, increased confidence, and reduced anxiety. Other than these benefits, the mere exposure effect also has five shortcomings in teaching and learning. These shortcomings include increasing boredom, reducing adaptability, difficulty in improving and changing one's style, limiting creativity and critical thinking, and facing difficulty in correcting misconceptions.

The first benefit that the mere exposure effect has on teaching and learning is enhanced memory. When people are exposed to a specific stimulus a lot of times, they become more familiar with it, resulting in their ability to remember it more easily. Also, since they are constantly exposed to the same stimulus, it will linger in their minds either consciously or unconsciously. In this way, the mere exposure effect can enhance someone's memory, which is beneficial for both teacher and learner. When a subject is learned or taught multiple times, it becomes easier to remember. Therefore, teacher and learner can use this technique to improve their ability to recall information.

The second benefit of the mere exposure effect is the ability to understand subjects more easily. When a teacher teaches the same subject over and over again, he becomes more familiar with the subject, and thus, he can understand it easier with the increase of exposure to the same subject. The same applies to students who are taught a specific subject on more than one occasion. This understanding becomes even easier due to the enhanced memory benefit discussed above.

The third benefit is increased teaching and learning efficiency. This benefit also builds up upon the previous benefits. Whereas having an enhanced memory and the ability to understand subjects more easily can contribute greatly to increasing the efficiency of teaching and learning. For teachers, having to teach a subject that they are familiar with gives them room to explain it in a good and understandable way since they remember it and understand it well. As for students, since they remember the subjects and can understand them easily, it will not be hard for them to revise the subject or understand the subjects that build upon the previously taken subjects.

The fourth benefit of the mere exposure effect is increasing the confidence of both the teacher and the learner. For the teachers, when they have the ability to remember a subject and understand it easily to the point of being able to teach it more efficiently, this will increase their confidence. The same goes for students who remember subjects and understand them easily to the point of understanding other similar subjects or being able to revise easily.

The fifth and last benefit of the mere exposure effect is reducing anxiety. It is very important to differentiate between increasing confidence and reducing anxiety since they are not the same thing. Even if someone is confident, that does not mean that they are not anxious and vice versa. The four previous benefits can help both the teacher and learner to reduce their anxiety in the case of the existence of all of them. Not to mention

that having a feeling of familiarity with a thing creates a form of positivity (Stevenson, 2022).

With all of these benefits, the mere exposure effect seems like a good thing in teaching and learning, but everything has benefits and shortcomings. As for shortcomings, the first shortcoming of the mere exposure effect in teaching and learning is boredom. Even though it is easier to explain or learn a subject that you are familiar with, it is also boring. This comes from the notion of having no new things to discuss and learn. Teaching and learning the same subject over and over again will make it a boring subject, which in turn will decrease a person's motivation to teach or learn it.

The second shortcoming of the mere exposure effect is the reduced adaptability. The world is always changing and moving toward new things, so it is important to adapt to it. However, due to the mere exposure effect existence in teaching and learning, both teachers and learners face difficulties in adapting to new subjects. Because teachers and learners are familiar with certain conditions, it is hard for them to adapt to new unfamiliar conditions. In other words, their over-familiarity with certain conditions makes it harder for them to adapt when these conditions change. In the end, People tend to evaluate stimulus or things that they are familiar with positively (Greul et al., 2023). This positive evaluation makes people stick to what they know and are comfortable with, while having difficulty in adapting and accepting new things.

The third shortcoming on the list is facing difficulty in improving and changing one's style. Teachers have a certain style of teaching that they are familiar with, and the same goes for students. However, because they are so used to using this specific style, it is hard for them to use other styles or to improve their existing styles of teaching and learning. This could cause a big problem for both teachers and students in case of facing conditions in which their existing style does not work, which may reduce their teaching and learning efficiency. Not to mention that using different styles in teaching and learning ensures good and efficient learning outcomes (Muuna & Kalam, 2021).

The fourth shortcoming of this effect is limiting creativity and critical thinking. For someone to be creative, he must think outside the box. However, what if the box is so comfortable that a person does not want to get outside it? This is the problem with the mere exposure effect, whereas it makes a person really comfortable with certain ways, ideas, and styles, making it really hard to think outside the thing that he is familiar with. This leads to repeating the same ideas and process of thinking over and over again without having new, interesting, and unique ideas.

The fifth and last shortcoming on this list is the inability to correct misconceptions easily. A person can be familiarized with anything, even mistakes and wrong information. This is even more true in the case of the mere exposure effect where an idea is strongly nested in a person's mind. It does not matter if this idea is wrong or not, but it will be hard to change it. In teaching and learning, when a person is taught something wrong more than one time, he will think it is correct even if it was a misconception, and the same is true for teaching. So, when these misconceptions are repeated a lot, the mind becomes familiar with them as correct notions despite them being wrong, and this makes it very hard to correct these ideas.

In the end, it is clear that the mere exposure effect is not only beneficial for teaching and learning, but it is also harmful sometimes. This is in a way, a natural thing since all things in life have good effects and bad effects depending on how they are used and the conditions that they are implemented in.

Method

McGrath et al. (2020) and Newman (2023) described a critical literature review as a methodology that tries to collect relevant information related to a given field of study. Following these guidelines this review attempted as far as possible to accurately identify most significant terms pertaining to this topic. Several peer-reviewed journal articles, academic books, and academic book chapters, that present empirical research results were included. Each article was carefully read to properly ascertain its meaning and contribution to this study. This research utilized several databases. Google Scholar provides scholarly and contemporary literature from different publishers, repositories, and websites. It also offers a wide overview of the topic. Thus, this critical literature review emphasized the interpretation, critique, and theoretical insight. BASE (Bielefeld Academic Search Engine) focuses on open-access scholarly documents and presents access to a wide range of full-text articles and other research outputs relevant to this research. CORE specializes in open access research and was accessible to a vast collection of scholarly papers. Semantic Scholar is powered by artificial intelligence that focuses on scientific literature. It was beneficial since it accentuated key concepts and identified worthwhile academic papers. Directory of Open Access Journals (DOAJ) is a directory that indexes open access, peer-reviewed journals (Bongomin et al., 2022).

To make these searches more effective the following activities were employed. It used a combination of broad, multidisciplinary databases and subject-specific ones. The use of keywords and subject headings were also incorporated. It further explored features like phrase searching, field restrictions, and citation searching to refine the results. It also utilized resources like conference proceedings, reports, and theses, which provided valuable insights. It used citation management tools such as: Tools like Zotero, Mendeley, or Paperpile to assist in organizing and managing of the references (Zheng et al., 2023).

This critical literature review is not without criticism. It only relied on methods other than direct observation and experimentation. This had the potential for lacking sufficient justification and can be susceptible to biases. It can be argued that without empirical foundation, this method can lead to unfounded and unrealistic conclusions or theories that are difficult to validate. Furthermore, this non-empirical approach can sometimes be seen as conservative, hindering revolutionary progress due to the lack of empirical input. To address these criticisms this researcher clearly articulated the justification for its use, acknowledged its limitations, and demonstrated its value in addressing the research questions. This was accomplished providing a strong theoretical foundation, accentuating the logical consistency and coherence of the approach, and highlighting the contribution to knowledge and understanding, even in the absence of empirical data.

Results

In order to answer the research question of this paper, which is “What is the effect of the mere exposure effect on language teaching and learning?”, the researcher reviewed and studied the mere exposure effect and a number of previous studies concerning it. After analyzing and understanding the mere exposure effect and the previous studies on the subject, the researcher found the following results:

Language teaching and learning processes are not very different from the normal processes of teaching and learning, which makes the mere exposure effect apply in the same way these processes. This shows that the mere exposure effect can have both positive and negative impacts on language teaching and learning. The reason for this is that the processes of teaching and learning involve various variables that can influence the outcome. In a way, the mere exposure effect is also one of these factors, and in order for it to have a positive impact on language teaching and learning, it needs to be accompanied by other favorable factors. These factors include varied and new subjects, varied styles of teaching and learning, adaptability, and passion for languages.

In their research, Betal and Banerjee (2023) introduce many factors that affect teaching and learning English as a second language, such as motivation, teaching and learning methods, curriculum, and problem-solving abilities among other factors. These factors are the same factors found in these results, but written in different words. Whereas motivation in a way equals love for the subject, teaching and learning methods equal teaching and learning styles, curriculum equals subjects, and problem-solving ability equals adaptability. Since English is a language, these factors also apply to language teaching and learning in general.

So, the first factor is having new and varied subjects, which may be somewhat contradictory to the process of the mere exposure effect that increases the favorability of a specific stimulus the more times a person is exposed to it. However, in this case, the meaning is to have new subjects to be taught and learned every now and then. These subjects should also be repeated after a specific period has passed on their introduction. This way, the subjects will stay interesting and refreshing while keeping the benefits of the mere exposure effect. If the subjects were repeated all the time over and over again while applying the mere exposure effect, this would result in boredom and reduced teaching efficiency.

The same things can be also said about the styles of teaching and learning if they are repetitive. In the case of teachers, having varied styles of teaching will help them to find the styles that suit them, improve themselves, and have the ability to teach different subjects that require different styles. As for students, having different learning styles will help them to understand subjects easily and from more than one angle. Not to mention that having different styles of learning can help them to learn different subjects that cannot be learned using their own traditional learning styles. As for how to keep the mere exposure effects positive benefits applied to this point, these different styles must be used for a certain period of time before changing to a new style, and after another while, they will be used again so that the teachers and learners become more familiar with them. If this is not taken into consideration, it will have a negative effect

on both the teacher and the learner. This is mostly true because teaching and learning styles alongside the curriculum are two of the most important components of teaching and learning (Padhi, 2021).

The third factor that helps the mere exposure effect to have a positive impact on language teaching and learning is adaptability. In this case, if teachers and learners become over-familiar with a specific set of conditions through the process of the mere exposure effect, they will be unable to function in the case of any change to these conditions. This will result in the mere exposure effect having a negative effect on language teaching and learning. That is why both teachers and learners must have the ability to adapt to new changes alongside the existence of the mere exposure effect. By trying to teach and learn in different sets of conditions every while and then, both teachers and learners can learn to adapt to new conditions easily while applying the mere exposure effect.

The last factor that has to exist in order for the mere exposure effect to have a positive effect on language teaching and learning is the love for languages. In the case of teachers, loving languages can help them in teaching them in a good and passionate way. The same goes for students who love languages, as they can learn them more easily because of their passion for the subject. This love in itself can boost the positive effect and benefits of the mere exposure effect. Whereas the mere exposure effect process depends on increasing favorability and familiarity with a certain subject, and that can be achieved much easier when love for this subject already exists. In this way, the positive effect of the mere exposure effect can be boosted, and this in turn will boost the love for languages. This way, both these factors can help each other to increase the proficiency of both language teaching and learning.

The existence of these factors is essential for the mere exposure effect to have a positive effect on language teaching and learning. However, in the case of these factors' non-existence or the existence of opposite factors, the mere exposure effect will have a negative effect on language teaching and learning. In correspondence with these results, the researcher tried to find specific studies that support the results found in this paper. However, due to the results of this research being primary data obtained by the researcher through analyzing the mere exposure effect, there was no study that could confirm these results. However, the researcher was able to find researchers that support and agree with the notion of teaching and learning being processes affected and created by the existence of many factors. One of these researchers is Saydee (2015), who confirms the existence of many factors in language teaching and learning. Another of these researchers is Bartz (2018), who states that there are many factors that contribute to teaching effectiveness. Through these results and the statements of these researchers, it is clear that language teaching and learning include many factors other than the mere exposure effect. It also proves that the effect of the mere exposure effect depends on the existence of the other factors.

Discussion

The results found after analyzing the process of the mere exposure effect and previous studies on the subject indicate that the mere exposure effect can have either a

positive or negative impact on language teaching and learning, depending on the existence of specific factors. These factors are the varied and new subjects, varied styles of teaching and learning, adaptability, and the passion for languages. When these subjects exist alongside the mere exposure effect, they help create a positive effect on language learning and teaching that improves and increases the efficiency of these processes.

These results show that the mere exposure effect is only a factor in both teaching and learning in general and in language teaching and learning. In order for the processes of language teaching and learning to occur, many factors must exist and function together to create these processes. The first of these factors is having new and varied subjects to teach and learn in the field of languages. Even though the existence of one subject can help teachers and students understand and remember it easily, it becomes boring for them to repeat it all the time. However, they can do this without feeling bored by repeating more than one language-related subject. The teacher can teach more than one subject and then repeat them after a while to remind the students of these subjects, and this will create the same effect as using the mere exposure effect for one subject, but without the accompanying boredom (Padhi, 2021).

The second factor of these factors is the existence of varied, different, and new styles of teaching and learning that are to be used interchangeably in different periods of time. This process will happen in a way that allows both the teachers and students to become familiar with more than one style, and this will help them to avoid the disadvantages of over-reliance on a certain style. Also, since these styles are used interchangeably, they will help both teachers and students to keep things interesting without being bored. Also, having more than one style can help to learn different subjects that are compatible with specific teaching and learning styles. By using these styles over and over, it will become easier to implement them anytime, and the favorability toward these styles will increase with the increased benefit of each style (Aldajah et al., 2014).

The third factor is adaptability, which is an important factor to increase the positive effect of the mere exposure effect. In a way, the mere exposure effect does have the same meaning of adaptability. Whereas the mere exposure effect allows one to adapt to a specific subject by increasing the favorability of this subject by increased exposure to it. However, it can be said that the mere exposure effect is a form of over-adaptability that can help someone adapt strongly to only one subject in a specific form, making him unable to adapt to changes in this subject or the conditions around it. So, it is important to apply different conditions in the processes of language teaching and learning, which will make teachers and learners able to adapt easily in case of any sudden changes.

The last factor that has to exist alongside the mere exposure effect for it to have a positive effect on language teaching and learning is the love of languages. The mere exposure effect is designed to increase familiarity, or in other words, love. So, if this love for the subject already exists, it will help the mere exposure effect to function easily, and in turn, this will help increase the familiarity of language teaching and learning, making them more efficient (Greul et al., 2023).

Conclusion

The Mere-Exposure Effect can have both a positive effect and a negative effect on language teaching and learning depending on the factors that exist alongside it. In order to make this effect positive, the existence of varied and new subjects, varied styles of teaching and learning, adaptability, and the passion for languages alongside the mere exposure effect is necessary.

This shows that besides monitoring the mere exposure effect alone in language teaching and learning, the other factors should be also monitored as well. The need for diverse subjects prevents monotony, varied teaching style prevent over-reliance, adaptability fosters resilience to change, and pre-existing love for languages facilitates the effectiveness of the mere exposure effect, ultimately making language education more efficient.

The mere exposure effect is nothing but a mere factor in the processes of language teaching and learning. That is why teachers and learners must pay attention to other factors ensuring their suitability to assist the mere exposure effect in increasing the efficiency of the language teaching and learning processes.

Extending upon the findings of this research, I provide the following recommendations: There is plenty of opportunity to conduct further studies in the field of language teaching and learning and the Mere-Exposure Effect. Further research could explore nuanced aspect such as the role of technology in enhancing the mere-exposure effect in teaching and learning, or the attitudinal effect of mere-exposure effect. Additionally, investigating how these impacts interacting in a variety of educational setting could provide valuable insights. This reaches paper can serve as a foundational base, opening and paving the way for more investigations that assess in a more understanding of the dynamics between the Mere-Exposure Effect and language teaching and learning.

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